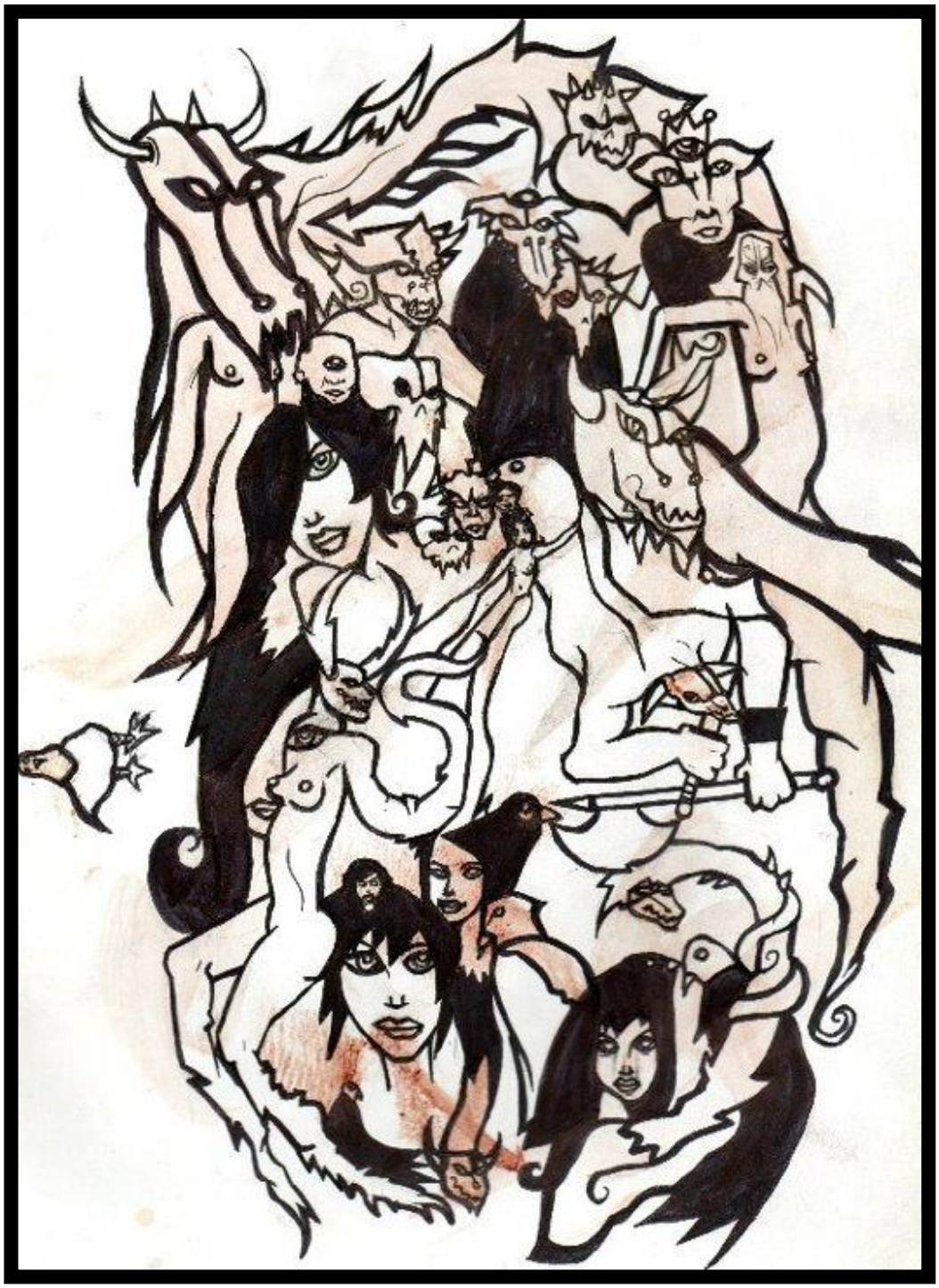
- TERRA INCOGNITA -

Graffiti Magick and the Urban Landscape



By Bood Samel

Introduction

Two of my main interests in life are graffiti, and the practice of ceremonial magic. It wasn't long after I started stumbling my way into magic that I started to notice similarities, and parallels between the acts of carrying out ceremonial magic, and going out and doing graffiti. Both are self-initiatory processes that transmute how we consciously interact with the world around us. When one picks up the bulky marker, or can of paint, and sets it against the drollness of modern homogenized landscapes, something changes in the mind of the implementer. Suddenly the world becomes a much more fantastic place. Seemingly bland urban landscapes become the playground of a hidden illicit art world. Everything becomes vast, and inspiring, while at the same time personalized. Blurred lines scrawled clandestinely all over the place become sigil gateways into a hidden, yet omnipresent world. Yet experience shows us that the drive towards the rapture of the fantastic belongs at our disposal, and in our individual control.

Like magic, graffiti is all around us, but both are hardly noticed by those not involved with either. It already is a form of the occult in the literal sense—hidden knowledge—its experience and understanding available only to the initiated. Graffiti is a hidden art, done clandestinely by individuals or groups, who more or less form a secret society. How many graffiti crew names are three letter acronyms, just like various occult groups–the O.T.O., the I.O.T., the E.O.D., etc.? The implementing of graffiti involves a process of making our surroundings conform to our will. It involves an evocation of dynamic, creative praxis upon various spaces/surfaces that in turn blurs the boundaries between the mundane and the fantastic imposed by western consumer anti-culture. "EVERY NUMBER IS INFINITE, THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE!" Very well indeed, and graffiti brings this realization to the forefront of our locale. It's not magic done in the ambiguous space of some "astral plane," but in our immediate environment.

Graffiti is a localized network of information exchange. Its information is itself, and its intent is so simple as to astound. It shows us that we only choose to be alienated from our surroundings and the modern landscape. It shows us that we still have the capacity for intimate, personal interaction with our surroundings, even if they are "unnatural". Everything that exists, exists in nature—there is no such thing as being outside of it. There is no getting back to nature; you never left, nor could you. Our environment still shows us a great dynamic of experience and process, regardless of how many strip malls we build to distract ourselves from the magnitude of what we are capable of experiencing.

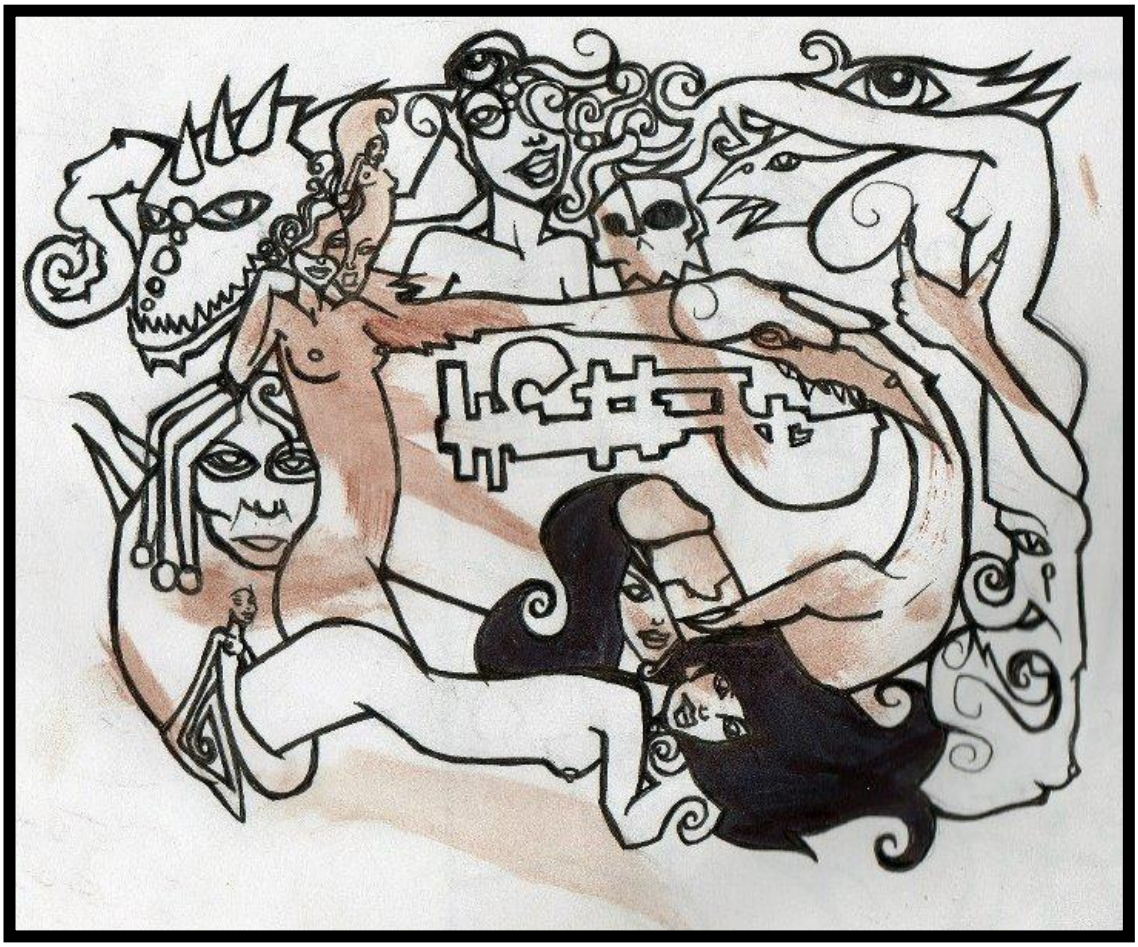
Antinomian Psychotopography

Carrying out graffiti changes how one consciously conceives notions of space, property and environment. These changes allow for the interactive personalizing of typically bleak, dehumanized, alienating modern landscapes. For the magician, this opens up a whole new realm to exploit and work with. Modern landscapes are only depersonalized if you choose not to interact with them. “The flow of things,” so to speak, is still present in man-made environments, and is still exploitable. If you live in a city, you develop a routine which causes you to come across the same people, and go by the same places, on a regular basis. Change your schedule, and patterns will still emerge. Synchronicities abound to a bewildering extent in an urban environment. Constantly omnipresent, amongst all this continual convergence of circumstance, is graffiti.

People often mix their magical practices with their art. For more horizontal, results-based magic, graffiti seems like the most logical art form to implement will through, as it is already an art form that causes our environments to conform to will, and is so firmly entrenched in our surroundings. In a city, graffiti comes and goes. It’s constantly shifting and changing. Some fades away, wheat-pasted flyers get ripped down, walls get buffed, but then more pops back up. Its very existence is fractal; it’s the stuff of chaos.

Hijacking graffiti for magic further mutates how the mind interacts and preserves modern landscapes. Alleyways as temples; dumpsters as alters; Mercury racing his message along graffiti-sigil-encrusted telephone poles; buses become the chariots of the gods; subway tunnels and the undersides of bridges become the subterranean depths of chthonic realms.

There are places in our time that “decent folk” avoid, or are oblivious to. Ghettos, undersides of bridges, (post) industrial wastelands, alleys, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, train tracks, train bridges, aqua ducts, steam tunnels, sewage drains, etc. These cracks in Babylon—unfit for, and forgotten by, the consumer god—are shrines of its inversion, the new antinomianism. These places are epicenters of “illicit,” unsupervised freedom—clandestine events, people getting wasted, having sex, sleeping, squatting, doing graffiti, or merely hanging out—all in a place unrelated to commerce (a “sin” in itself) that isn’t some trite, regulated, allotted park. In our era, which lacks Terra Incognita (land unknown), these places become our secret valleys, our new Atlantis, our new Alamuts.



Street Guerilla Magic Tactics

Sigils and servitors seem to be the two key magical techniques that lend themselves well to graffiti magic. Tag sigils around places prior to charging them. Go to your local printer and make a stack of sigil stickers. Try making a tag by rearranging the letters in a statement of intent, then spray it everywhere prior to charging it. Paint your sigil into a huge, elaborate, graffiti-style painting to disassociate yourself from its original intent. Now your will shall manifest from multiple points of probability.

Take the location of works of graffiti magic into account with the probability of your ritual work. Play the law of averages and fields of probability into your favor as much as possible. Always decrease the room of chance working against you. Use graffiti paintings as the material basis of servitors. Try programming into the servitor that it is to live as long as the painting is up, then paint in a spot that you know will get buffed in a few weeks if you are concerned about its disposal. Draw a picture of a servitor as its material basis, and then make a stack of photocopies to wheat paste everywhere. Create servitors with these methods who are intended to function virally or vampiricly. Create tags to exist as viral memetic servitors to act your intent through those they come across and infect. Create an art campaign of terror against your enemies in the form of a vampiric servitor that is to feed off of their fear and panic.

There's a great deal of room for exploration in these ideas, and the few presented here are only the tip of the iceberg of what could be done. It has been my personal practice to put stuff up first, and then go do the workings, but this has been a matter of personal preference. I also attempt to avoid those areas for a bit when at all possible. Digital cameras are very handy with this form of work. Try taking a photo of a place, altering it towards your intent, and working it into a piece of art to put back on the location. When mixing art and ritual magic, it’s useful to have the material and objective aspects of what you’re doing parallel with your intent and what’s going on subjectively in your head. Taping environmental sounds from the areas you’re working with and then splicing them into random juxtapositions can really help in the rituals themselves, specifically if your aim is to effect the places, or those directly involved with them. Public transit provides a common liminal space, and places of fluctuation are often easier to work with. Bus stations, train stations and subway stations are prime targets.

Try video-taping your graffiti magic artwork, then performing the rituals necessary from the view of a TV screen, so as to disassociate oneself from lust for result. This technique, as devised by Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth in the 1980s, lends itself well to graffiti magic.

If you're working with a particular place for a long period of time (cities usually have specific areas where lots of graffiti pops up) you might want to try to find the locations of your work in your dreams. Devise sigils to dream of specific spots, and of course put them there in the physical world. Or choose places to do graffiti magic based on dreams you have. A good deal of ritual magic (sigils specifically) is mediating the subconscious to integrate some form of magical intent into the unconscious, so using themes already in your head will save you effort, and most likely work better. Magic should be lived directly and head on. It's not something detached from the rest of our lives.

Get out of the bars, clubs and coffee shops and out into the world. Break away from passive participation and pursuit of idle oblivion. Walk the streets insulating your intent in everything around you, feel your desire being absorbed into life and expressed through it. Explore and find out things for yourself through direct involvement in your life.

Find value and meaning in and through action.

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